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## Vegetative Politics from Crèvecoeur to Hawthorne

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When J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur observes that “men are like plants” in *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), he draws on contemporary medical topography, which mapped the physical features of particular locales onto human health and character.<sup>1</sup> In the human as in the vegetable world, it is the larger environment that determines health and quality: “The goodness and flavor of the fruit proceeds from the peculiar soil and exposition in which they grow” (71). Quite literally for Crèvecoeur, sunny and dry conditions yield one type of human being, shaded and damp another, and so on for each climate. The sea “inspires” those who live near it “with a love of traffic” and an extensive network of humans, animals, and merchandise (71). The dense and confining habitat of the “great woods,” by contrast, generates people unable to move freely, often confounded by “drunkenness or idleness” or stumped by “contention, inactivity and wretchedness” (72). And just as plants are wholly shaped by their “peculiar soil and exposition,” material environment, for Crèvecoeur, is not one aspect of human thriving among many. It is paramount: “We are nothing but what we derive from the air we breathe, the climate we inhabit, the government we obey, the system of religion we profess, and the nature of our employment” (71). Here, the cultural (government, religion, occupation) and natural (air, soil, climate) merge. Throughout *Letters*, plants help Crèvecoeur argue that the situation of human beings, in toto, circumscribes norms, customs, and health.<sup>2</sup> Humans are not fundamentally self-determining, and the social, Crèvecoeur suggests, interweaves with the animal, vegetable, and mineral worlds.<sup>3</sup> Humans do not control nature but are vulnerable, exposed,

and embedded. Other eighteenth-century writers theorizing a fungible, porous human nature, including Montesquieu, Rousseau, Raynal, and Buffon, helped shape Crèvecoeur's view.<sup>4</sup>

Yet in the early nineteenth century, biological sciences increasingly posited the human as both separate from and sovereign over a nonhuman natural world that was in turn consummately available for use. Importantly, this discrete "nature" actually included certain humans. To justify their exploitation, white Europeans and Americans developed increasingly pernicious racialized and sexualized ideologies. These included polygenist theories, which argued that multiple, distinct, racialized species of the human had evolved over time, with some shaped by nature, and others, shapers thereof. Thus, where earlier thinkers used environmentalism to understand how differences among humans come to be, early nineteenth-century biological sciences increasingly sought to establish human difference as innate.<sup>5</sup> As Andrew S. Curran outlines, if European thinkers at the beginning of the eighteenth century shared the founding principle that African peoples were "inferior" members of the same species, by the century's end, sharp divergences emerge. Some radicals, such as Abbé Grégoire, argue for a fundamentally shared humanity. Yet others begin to compile "evidence" that different races are in fact different species, with white people atop a humanist hierarchy, distinguished by their alleged separation from nature.<sup>6</sup>

Intriguingly, Curran identifies on the one hand an earlier *botanical* frame that understands human difference as so many varieties, for example, Buffon and Rousseau, and, on the other, an emerging *zoological* frame that understands human difference as race, even to the extent of constituting fundamentally different species, for example, Edward Long and Valentin de Cullion (x–xi). In this later period, differences that had been understood as exterior were largely interiorized, with the end of the century seeing a rise in arguments for an immutably deficient Black intellect as "natural history was exiling the *nègre* from the family of man" (213). Eventually, the sovereign human emerged as white and male, while a range of others remained inextricably entangled with the natural world. This shift, from understanding human difference as vegetable variety to classing it as biological species, had sweeping ramifications. Sylvia Wynter describes a "new distinction" emerging during this era between Europeans as "a people of reason (*gente de razón*) and the non-European population groups . . . classified as 'brute peoples without reason' who were no less naturally determined to be so."<sup>7</sup> She labels Euro/American self-conceptualization "Man" with a capital *M*, to denote an explicitly

exclusionary “secular liberal monohumanist conception of our being human,” which is insidious precisely because it “overrepresents” itself not as one human variety among many but as “the being of being human itself.”<sup>8</sup> As Katherine McKittrick explains, “The figure of the human [as Man] is tied to epistemological histories that . . . systemically excise the world’s most marginalized.”<sup>9</sup> Those excluded from this overrepresentation include women, children, people with disabilities, the underclass, indigenous people, and people of color, with Black people occupying the lowest status of all. Aligning these people with a natural world that he seems himself as separate from and sovereign over, Man calls their full humanity into question and thereby justifies their exploitation.

As this ostensibly universal ideal of Man as distinct from nature increasingly underwrote nineteenth-century politics and philosophy, tension between sovereign and porous conceptions of the human persisted in US arts and letters. This is unsurprising given the broad sweep of exclusion. Edgar Allan Poe’s oeuvre brims with intimate entanglements among men, women, animals and the nonhuman natural world; William Apess’s 1829 spiritual autobiography *A Son of the Forest* describes God-revived souls and indigenous Americans as “wild plants;”; Frederick Douglass’s 1845 *Narrative* turns on human/animal metamorphoses: “Behold a man transformed into a brute!” / “You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man;” Emily Dickinson’s plants and animals give form to human abstractions: “Hope is the thing with feathers ” (254), “moss” is “cunning” (148), and “a fly buzz” interrupts the passage to death (465); and Herman Melville’s eponymous white whale is himself endowed with “intelligent malignity.”<sup>10</sup> Yet perhaps the most dramatic engagement with human-nature continuity comes in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “Rappaccini’s Daughter” (1844), whose titular character is a plant-woman hybrid, and in “Chiefly About War Matters” (1862), with its troubling vegetable commentary on poetry, blood, and race.

Crèvecoeur writes in a colonial and revolutionary context far removed from Hawthorne’s immersion in debates about enslavement or democracy’s future, yet both authors depict human nature as fundamentally similar to plant nature, receptive to cultivation and agent of either wellness or disease. The emerging modern science seeking definitively to separate humans from the natural world was one of Hawthorne’s principle preoccupations.<sup>11</sup> “Rappaccini’s Daughter” focalizes tension between sovereign and contingent conceptions of human nature through the poisonous Beatrice and her toxic sister-plant, with Beatrice’s father and suitor misguidedly seeking mastery and purity.<sup>12</sup>

The tale suggests that a more horizontal, collaborative world-orientation could supplant vertical, controlling hierarchies if humankind embraced its affinities with plantkind, rather than seeking impossible degrees of control.<sup>13</sup> While this reading does not redeem Hawthorne's racist attitudes before and during the Civil War, it does, as I demonstrate below, offer a fresh view on his passivity regarding enslavement.

Recently, Americanist literary scholars have devoted significant attention to animal, and even mineral, post- or nonhuman agencies, while relatively little has been said about vegetable agencies. Yet centering the peculiar forms of personhood, politics, and poetics that plants produce in Crèvecoeur's and Hawthorne's work allows us to expand the canon of nineteenth-century ecocritical writers, and to trace the contours of an alternative humanism that indexes yet also exceeds traditional humanism's racialization. To be sure, neither author realizes an anticolonial humanism, "a humanism made to the measure of the world," to quote Aimé Césaire.<sup>14</sup> Yet these two white male authors of the long nineteenth century neither accede to Man's most pernicious racisms, as their contemporaries increasingly did, nor do they categorically abandon the human in the face of Man's atrocities, as many twentieth-century antihumanists or twenty-first-century posthumanists later would. To "give humanness a different future," rather than refresh and recycle exclusionary logics, structures, and practices, we must retain awareness of this past.<sup>15</sup>

In the readings that follow, I demonstrate that Hawthorne's and Crèvecoeur's understanding of plant/human intra-action, in particular the role plants play in shaping human stories, prevents them from positioning the abstracted white man atop a humanist hierarchy. If, increasingly across the periods that link both writers, polygenism proffered a way to understand how some people were entangled with nature while others stood apart and controlled it, neither Crèvecoeur nor Hawthorne could accept that theory. Often despite themselves, both writers understand that a profound interweaving of vegetable and human existence necessarily unites all human beings. Indeed, as I detail below, key crisis moments erupt for both Crèvecoeur and Hawthorne when recognizing human entwinement with nature stymies the increasingly pressing task of establishing Man's dominance. Yet white supremacy is horrifyingly adaptive. As Kyla Schuller's recent work on race, sex, and science in the latter half of the nineteenth century demonstrates, the individual's responsiveness to the environment, or "degree of impressibility," later emerges as a eugenic category securing white supremacy.<sup>16</sup> My readings extend this

work backward to suggest that precisely crises like those Crèvecoeur and Hawthorne dramatize, in which acknowledging human-nature entanglement disallows accession to racialized humanist hierarchies, necessitate white supremacy's construction of the later sentimental epistemologies Schuller describes. As much as such flashpoints confirm lamentable aspects of Hawthorne's and Crèvecoeur's politics, they also bring into view the possibility of an alternative humanism worth nourishing insofar as its incorporation of environmental concerns apprehends humanism's racialization and therefore retains reparative potential.

### Plant-Persons

A French American who farmed in upstate New York and later wrote for English and European audiences, J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur is most often remembered as the first writer to define "this new man," the "American" (43–44). In letter 3, "What Is an American," Crèvecoeur's American appears as a white, male landholder, much like his fictional narrator, Farmer James. Crèvecoeur portrays the prototypical American as a self-determined, self-sustaining, unrefined yet free- and right-thinking cultivator, what Leo Marx described as "a simple yet educated man, a noble democrat," the Jeffersonian agrarian ideal's prototype.<sup>17</sup> Yet if early in *Letters* Farmer James embodies an exemplary citizen as abstracted from the natural world and abstracting it to assert sovereign agency over it, the book's end leaves that ideal in ruins.<sup>18</sup> By letter 9, Farmer James's horrifying encounter with plantation slavery unravels discrete human agency. And by letter 12, revolution displaces the industrious James, now paralyzed by anxiety: "Which ever way I look, nothing but the most frightful precipices present themselves" (187).<sup>19</sup> Crèvecoeur recasts the moral geography of good/America and evil/Europe as the collapse of social order due to forces that have been in play from the beginning. In this eminently entangled world, the self-supporting individual farmer's sovereign agency has always been illusory.

Crèvecoeur's writings about plants confront these matters of agency and entanglement. In showing "how Europeans became Americans," Crèvecoeur emphasizes that environment shapes human nature, with America's vast stretches of arable land enabling human thriving (48, 42–43). Via vegetal descriptions, James presents "Andrew, the Hebridean," as a quintessential American, combining good character, sober industry, and fertile yet not overly productive land to flourish in America. Andrew convinces James that "they [Hebrideans] seem to live according to the rules of nature, which gives them but bare subsistence; their

constitutions are uncontaminated by any excess or effeminacy, which their soil refuses" (74). Since Hebridean character accords with its soil, James wonders how their morals, religion, and manners would change in a more forgiving environment: "This society would present an interesting spectacle could they be transported on a richer soil. But perhaps that soil would soon alter everything; for our opinions, vices, and virtues are altogether local: we are machines fashioned by every circumstance around us" (74–75). Crèvecoeur thus entertains the notion of an essential Hebridean character, only to wind up emphasizing local circumstance's constitutive function. Notably, the botanic world exemplifies passivity in Crèvecoeur's explication: rather than self-determining agents, humans depend on local soil and weather. Precisely in being plant-like, humans are machines, circumstantially contrived and directed by external stimuli.

As in James's description of the Hebrideans, Crèvecoeur's sense of human enmeshment with vegetal nature often impedes James's nascent inclination to classify people into distinct races, with different inherent tendencies, characters, and predilections. This happens again when James writes, "Whence the difference arises I know not; but, out of twelve families of emigrants of each country, generally seven Scotch will succeed, nine German, and four Irish" (60). German women, he tells us, can work as hard as their husbands; Scotch people "are frugal and laborious," while Irish people "love to drink and to quarrel" (60–61). He likewise suggests that people from equatorial regions, even pleasant ones, are inferior to those in more temperate zones. Letter 9 says, "We find the most wretched people in the world" in lands seemingly "intended for terrestrial paradises" since "spontaneous riches of nature" are "shed on those beautiful regions with the most profuse hand" (162). James seems to echo Jefferson in desiring the natural sciences to confirm his "suspicion" that African people constitute a biologically distinct race.<sup>20</sup> But while Crèvecoeur's American remains definitively European, the possibility that "transplantation" would radically change tropical peoples (just as Scottish people might deteriorate if "transported on a richer soil") preponderates.

Similarly, James's occasional suggestions that the human categorically differs from the plant quickly dissolve. For example, he distinguishes *vegetating* from *living* when he writes, "hitherto he [the poor European] had not lived, but simply vegetated; he now feels himself a man" (57–58). Yet here again Crèvecoeur never solidifies this stance. Consider the following passage: "Here they [the poor] are become men: in Europe they were as so many useless plants, wanting vegetative

mould and refreshing showers. They withered; and were mowed down by want, hunger and war; but now, by the power of transplantation, like all other plants, they have taken root and flourished!" (42–43). At first glance this seems to reinforce an anthropocentric hierarchy, insofar as the poor "become men" where they had previously been "useless plants." Yet James's vegetal metaphors take on a life of their own: careful consideration dissolves humans' and plants' apparent distinctiveness, and the former's superiority. The metamorphosis James describes is not primarily "plant" to "man" but rather "useless" to "flourishing." That is to say, if changing environment has allowed the European poor to become *human*, nevertheless the vegetable metaphors governing this analysis insist that to become human is to be "like all other plants."

Hawthorne, though writing more than sixty years later, likewise applies botanical frames to explore the fate of humankind in a "new" world, given its fall in the old. Giovanni Guasconti, the figure the narrator follows most closely in "Rappaccini's Daughter," exemplifies another provincial individual who, like Farmer James, seemingly desires sovereign agency yet winds up undone by entanglement within a larger world. Notably, Hawthorne includes "Rappaccini's Daughter" itself as a specimen of plant nature, one of his "Mosses from an Old Manse" (the "Old Manse" was his Concord home). These mosses, Hawthorne suggests, uniquely relate to time, pulsing with new vitality while simultaneously recalling times long past: "The mosses, of ancient growth upon the walls, looked green and fresh, as if they were the newest things and an after-thought of Time."<sup>21</sup> To human observers, plants' temporalities appear out of sync, simultaneously fresh and primordial.<sup>22</sup> Yet if plants live, move, and strive in time frames that often evade humans, they are therefore, for Hawthorne, all the more engaging. This prompted Henry James to remark, "The pages in the Note-Books which relate to his life at the Manse, and the introduction to the Mosses, make more of his relations with vegetable nature . . . than of the human elements of the scene."<sup>23</sup> If Hawthorne's preoccupying "relations with vegetable nature" put James off, this is because he misses the fact that "the human elements of the scene" remain for Hawthorne enmeshed with the natural world.

In a much commented-upon prefatory remark to "Rappaccini's Daughter," the narrator highlights human-plant enmeshment with a playful discussion of the story's author: "We do not remember to have seen any translated specimens of the productions of M. de l'Aubépine."<sup>24</sup> The French M. de l'Aubépine, or "Mr. Hawthorn" references the hawthorn plant or aubépine, a shrub bearing red berries native to temperate



regions, and here again Hawthorne's tale appears as a *specimen*. Famously, Hawthorne added the "w" to his name to distance himself from his Salem ancestors, the Hathornes, judges who handed down brutal sentences, including at the notorious Salem witch trials. Yet the plant affinities his new name asserted, such as in his play on this botanical name in the opening of "Rappaccini's Daughter," are often overlooked. As Gillian Brown notes, Hawthorne was fond of botanical names for his characters and even named his own daughter Rose.<sup>25</sup> For Hawthorne, the human and vegetable are not clearly demarcated but rather relate interdependently.

Hawthorne understood that controlling the natural world and disentangling it from the human are impossible, and "Rappaccini's Daughter," along with many of Hawthorne's other works, warns of the twin dangers arising from attempts to do so. Hawthorne explicitly portrays these misguided attempts as masculinist, thereby offering an implicit critique of Man, even as his own misogyny remains palpable in the killing of characters like Beatrice (whose learning and power index her monstrosity) and Georgiana (whose passivity indexes her purity), and in the unenviable fates awaiting strong female characters in his novels, for example, Hester Prynne, Zenobia, or Alice Pyncheon. Arriving in Padua from Italy's rural south, Giovanni begins, like James, viewing the city's complications as degrading pastoral simplicity. However, *Letters* and "Rappaccini's Daughter" both ultimately suggest that the problem is not the innocent, uncompromised young man assailed by the world's corruption but rather idealized pursuit of noncomplicity. Observing Beatrice in her father's garden from his window, Giovanni is captivated by her mysterious beauty and still more mysterious affinity for the lovely bloom at the garden's heart. Giovanni's pursuit of Beatrice, his desire to claim her as wife, is thwarted by the realization that marrying Beatrice would result not in his sovereignty over her but rather his collusion with, and susceptibility to, her vegetable entanglements.<sup>26</sup> He repudiates her as a "poisonous thing," both "loathsome, and deadly" (207).

Giovanni's love for Beatrice, typologizing patriarchal love, is inextricably linked with a desire for control; thus, it is unsurprising that he above all seeks not her safety or well-being but the preservation of his own purity. Beatrice, by contrast, recognizes her double imbrication with nature as a plant-human hybrid and as a woman. In accepting Giovanni's "antidote" (well aware its effects would be fatal), Beatrice exercises a highly constrained agency (the cost, after all, is death) that simultaneously overturns her father's will to dominance and Giovanni's

obsession with his own purity. “Dost thou deem it misery to be endowed with marvelous gifts against which no power nor strength could avail an enemy?” Rappaccini asks her at the end: “Wouldst thou, then, have preferred the condition of a weak woman, exposed to all evil and capable of none?” (208–9). Interestingly, Beatrice does not answer directly. Instead, her murmured evasion speaks volumes: “I would fain have been loved, not feared” (209). Recognizing Man’s love and desire for dominance as one and the same, Beatrice concedes but does not condone the fact that women’s social acceptance requires weakness. And if she would rather be loved than feared, she does not therefore reject her plant nature. Giovanni finds unbearable the realization that coupling with Beatrice means complicity, not dominion, and Hawthorne’s narrator suggests that Giovanni’s “blighting words” (208) are his most deadly mistake. Giovanni is tragically “incapable” of the “high faith” needed to discern that the “ugly mystery” surrounding Beatrice was illusory, since “the real Beatrice was a heavenly angel” (206). Beatrice’s death is literally laid at the feet of both Rappaccini and Giovanni: “Thus the poor victim of man’s ingenuity and of thwarted nature, and of the fatality that attends all such efforts of perverted wisdom, perished there, at the feet of her father and Giovanni” (209). Rappaccini’s attempt to bend the natural world to his sovereign will kills his daughter. And Giovanni, demanding that his individual sense experience (of Beatrice’s malignancy) accord with deeper inner truth (of Beatrice’s love), becomes equally culpable.

Driven by fantasies of control, Hawthorne’s men fail to recognize the manifold vectors of well-being humans share with plants. In “The Birthmark,” another cautionary allegory, Aylmer inadvertently murders his beloved in the attempt to remove a small hand-shaped birthmark, “a crimson stain upon the snow” of her otherwise perfect face.<sup>27</sup> Here the links with botany are telling: in a moment of foreshadowing, Aylmer encourages Georgiana, reluctant to interfere with such a precious bloom, to pluck a beautiful laboratory-created one: “The flower will wither in a few moments and leave nothing save its brown seed vessels; but thence may be perpetuated a race as ephemeral as itself” (124). Yet her touch destroys the plant itself and its seeds. Later, Aylmer removes a diseased geranium’s “unsightly . . . blotches” while testing a “cure” intended for Georgiana (129). But like the rare flower from earlier in the story, she cannot withstand Man’s interference. All but removing her birthmark, the remedy also takes her life. While Hawthorne’s tales thus illuminate human entanglement with the natural world, they do not exactly celebrate this connectivity. Rather, they warn those attempting

mastery of the natural world that only complicity is possible. Hawthorne seems sympathetic to Giovanni's desire for purity; it is his blind pursuit of it that is destructive. Likewise, Rappaccini's exertion of control is "perverted" wisdom, not genuine depravity. The desire to overcome nature, Hawthorne's tales suggest, is understandable: the refusal to recognize the impossibility thereof is tragic.

### Plant-Politics

Hawthorne's limited critique of Man's hubris was timely, as biological sciences strove to establish white male dominance over the natural world and the people aligned therewith. As Cristin Ellis writes, the "uneasy détente" of eighteenth-century environmentalists, who "finessed the tension between embodied diversity and human equality" by "treating racial differences as secondary acquisitions superimposed over . . . empirical sameness" collapsed. By the mid-nineteenth century, race theory "revoked environmentalism's notion of a latent human uniformity."<sup>28</sup> This is not to suggest that monogenetic or environmentalist theories were not racist; rather, that by the early nineteenth century, they could not establish racial enslavement's biological justification. Arguing that racial hierarchies rely on ontologies of nature as discrete from Man, Wynter describes the "slave plantation system manned by 'Negroes' coming to centrally function so as to produce and reproduce the socioeconomic and ontological hierarchies of the order as if indeed they had been mandated by the ostensibly extrahuman agency of 'natural law.'"<sup>29</sup> Of course these dynamics were already in play by the eighteenth century, such that even in *Letters*, Crèvecoeur's understanding of nature, human and nonhuman, is conflicted.<sup>30</sup>

From this perspective, assessing the political implications of both Crèvecoeur's and Hawthorne's work requires us to understand their fundamentally conflicted views of human and nonhuman nature vis-à-vis race. Scholars often simplify both Crèvecoeur's politics and his understanding of nature, as when Leo Marx concludes that Crèvecoeur, intent on avoiding "the obvious dilemma of pastoral politics," sees American nature as "a place apart, secluded from the world—a peaceful, lovely, classless, bountiful pasture" (116). By contrast, Ian Frederick Finseth notes Crèvecoeur's oscillation between Hobbes's nature as universal war and Rousseau's nature as essential innocence (81). Yet Finseth too oversimplifies Crèvecoeur's nature, arguing that it "exists for him in objectified form, either as a benevolent, passive, maternal provider or as the raw material that the human hand or mind must shape, literally or

metaphorically” (84). These reductive conclusions, that nature for Crèvecoeur represents externality and separation, result from mistakenly conflating Farmer James with the ideal individualist, self-supporting yeoman farmer. Ed White calls this comparison of James to Jefferson’s yeoman “a misleading one given the narrative conclusion of the *Letters*,” and Christopher Iannini details the irony of Jefferson’s understanding of the published *Letters* as a “valuable resource for promoting [Jefferson’s] agrarian ideal.”<sup>31</sup> Such conflations place Crèvecoeur squarely in a genealogy that culminates with an Emersonian identification of nature as “the NOT ME.”<sup>32</sup> But just as Farmer James is not Jefferson’s agrarian ideal, Crèvecoeur is not a clear antecedent for this dictum. Although James sometimes prefers to see Man separate from and superior to nature, Crèvecoeur finds escaping recognition of human plantlike fungibility and porousness impossible, and this undermines the racial science on which white superiority will increasingly come to depend.

Human-nature entanglement pervades the scene that critics of the past two decades have uniformly read as central to understanding *Letters* as a whole: Farmer James’s excruciating encounter outside Charleston with an enslaved man being tortured. Because Crèvecoeur presents social entwinement with nature so intricately here, this difficult passage requires extended quotation:

My mind is, and always has been, oppressed since I became a witness to [the following scene]. I was not long since invited to dine with a planter . . . In order to avoid the heat of the sun, I resolved to go on foot, sheltered in a small path, leading through a pleasant wood. I was leisurely travelling along, attentively examining some peculiar plants which I had collected, when all at once I felt the air strongly agitated, though the day was perfectly calm and sultry. I immediately cast my eyes toward the cleared ground, from which I was but a small distance, in order to see whether it was not occasioned by a sudden shower; when at that instant a sound, resembling a deep rough voice, uttered, as I thought, a few inarticulate monosyllables. Alarmed and surprized, I precipitately looked all round, when I perceived, at about six rods distance, something resembling a cage, suspended to the limbs of a tree, all the branches of which appeared covered with large birds of prey, fluttering about, and anxiously endeavouring to perch on the cage. Actuated by an involuntary motion of my hands, more than by any design of my mind, I fired at them; they all flew to a short distance,

with a most hideous noise: when, horrid to think and painful to repeat, I perceived a negro, suspended in the cage, and left there to expire! I shudder when I recollect that the birds had already picked out his eyes; his cheek bones were bare; his arms had been attacked in several places, and his body seemed covered with a multitude of wounds. From the edges of the hollow sockets, and from the lacerations with which he was disfigured, the blood slowly dropped, and tinged the ground beneath. No sooner were the birds flown, than swarms of insects covered the whole body of this unfortunate wretch, eager to feed on his mangled flesh and to drink his blood. I found myself suddenly arrested by the power of affright and terror; my nerves were convulsed; I trembled, I stood motionless, involuntarily contemplating the fate of this negro in all its dismal latitude. The living spectre, though deprived of his eyes, could still distinctly hear, and, in his uncouth dialect, begged me to give him some water to allay his thirst. Humanity herself would have recoiled back with horror. (162–63)

Crèvecoeur renders racial slavery as a brutal collusion of the natural world with planter/enslaver: birds and insects complete the torment James's Charleston friend initiated, as soil drinks the condemned's blood. Nature's complicity with Man's atrocity dismantles Crèvecoeur's prior representations of nature's beneficence. James, still amateur naturalist innocently examining "peculiar" plant specimens, becomes no longer nature's disinterested observer but instead its complicit co-actant. James's agency is sharply curtailed; not only is he drawn into "involuntary contemplation of this negro, in all its dismal latitude," but he fires his gun not by will but reflex, "actuated by an involuntary motion of his hands." Represented as *James's* trauma, rather than the enslaved man's, this experience forecloses James's own individual agency.<sup>33</sup>

James ends the scene paralyzed, equally unable to defend or oppose slavery. In what had appeared merely a "pleasant wood," Crèvecoeur encounters "the history of the earth!": nature and human together commit "crimes of the most heinous nature" (159). The earth readily drinks spilled blood, leaving nowhere for "humanity herself" to find respite (162). James offers water, but since his involuntary firing has left his gun without a ball, he cannot end the man's suffering. Mustering "strength enough to walk away," James proceeds to the planter/torturer's home. "There I heard that the reason for this slave's being thus punished was on account of his having killed the overseer of the plantation.

They told me that the laws of self-preservation rendered such executions necessary; and supported the doctrine of slavery with the arguments generally made use of to justify the practice; with the repetition of which I shall not trouble you at present" (165). At once a casualty of the enslaver's gruesome punishment and complicit in it, like the birds and swarms of insects who feed on the enslaved man's eyes and flesh, James is nourished at the planter's table.

What Crèvecoeur captures here can be usefully described as Man at a loss: a conflicted creature whose crisis points flash across eras, including the antebellum period. Farmer James's conviction that human life is enmeshed in nature prevents him from justifying the caged man's torture, but his aim to represent America as a place where European men can uniquely thrive compels him to shunt that recognition to the margins. Though Hawthorne lived and wrote when Euro-Americans had developed polygenetic biological racisms mitigating such tensions, the fact that he himself remained similarly conflicted demonstrates a persistent conviction of human-nature entanglement and also shows how that conviction continued to trouble an otherwise horrifyingly adaptive white supremacy. By the mid-nineteenth century, a view of the human as both separate from and sovereign over a nonhuman "natural" world increasingly underwrote regnant conceptions of US citizenship. Such a view is often associated with Emerson, whom Hawthorne knew well; indeed, Emerson wrote "Nature" in the very Old Manse that Hawthorne would later make famous. Yet Hawthorne remained suspicious of transcendentalism's abstractions. He deemed Emerson a "mystic, stretching his hand out of cloud-land, in vain searching for something real."<sup>34</sup> In "Old Manse," Hawthorne writes that Emerson's hopeful "mountains, gleaming lakes, glimpses of a creation among the chaos" were exceedingly vulnerable to "delusions." To Hawthorne's eyes, Emerson's "beacon burning on a hill-top" makes "the surrounding obscurity" not clearer but more impenetrable (37). As both "Rappaccini's Daughter" and "The Birthmark" indicate, Hawthorne feared the idealism pervading transcendental views of nature and believed the pursuit of purity transcendentalism often inspired too easily spelled disaster for anyone unlucky enough to wind up in its wake, like Beatrice or Georgiana.

Yet the degree of complicity that Hawthorne was willing to accept is at least as troubling. Most notably, many scholars criticize Hawthorne's quiescence on the period's most pressing issue: slavery. Considering twenty-first-century perspectives on Hawthorne, Luke Bresky cites a generally recuperative trend, while Hawthorne criticism remains

vexed by the author's deplorable social and political positions: "Is 'our' Hawthorne still to be read as an anxious conservative, tainted by sexist, racist, and nationalist ideologies?"<sup>35</sup> Evidence abounds that Hawthorne advocated bigoted views of women, people of color, and those obstructing US imperial ambitions, especially in the wake of the US-Mexican War. In his 1852 presidential campaign biography for former classmate Franklin Pierce, Hawthorne lauded the wisdom of "look[ing] upon slavery as one of those evils which divine Providence does not leave to be remedied by human contrivances, but which, in its own good time, by some means impossible to be anticipated, but of the simplest and easiest operation, when all its uses shall have been fulfilled, it causes to vanish like a dream."<sup>36</sup> Hawthorne represents enslavement not as a social, political, or economic problem with a human solution but as a natural evil that a benevolent providence must, sooner or later, weed out of its own accord.

This is a vegetative politics serving the political and economic status quo, and it remains difficult, to say the least, for many readers to countenance. Hawthorne's vegetative politics, with its racist sympathies, is likewise on display in his reflections on encountering fugitive African Americans in his 1862 essay "Chiefly About War Matters." Like Crèvecoeur's experience in Charleston, this passage's political shortcomings make it worth considering at length. Farmer James's encounter with racist brutality produced paralysis. Crèvecoeur could have salvaged a view of nature as wise and ultimately benevolent had he been willing to separate white man from the environment. Instead he doubled down on human entwinement with nature, even when doing so meant stripping James of his sovereign agency. Despite writing in a later era, Hawthorne nevertheless equally resists that frame, and his commitment to sovereign agency is thereby likewise compromised.

One very pregnant token of a social system thoroughly disturbed was presented by a party of contrabands, escaping out of the mysterious depths of Secessia; . . . They were unlike the specimens of their race whom we are accustomed to see at the North, and in my judgment, were far more agreeable. So rudely were they attired,—as if their garb had grown upon them spontaneously,—so picturesquely natural in manners, and wearing such a crust of primeval simplicity, (which is quite polished away from the Northern black man) that they seemed a kind of creature by themselves, not altogether human, but perhaps quite as good, and

akin to the fauns and rustic deities of olden times. I wonder whether I shall excite anybody's wrath by saying this. It is no great matter. At all events, I felt most kindly towards these poor fugitives, but knew not precisely what to wish on their behalf, nor in the least how to help them. For the sake of the manhood which is latent in them, I would not have turned them back; but I should have felt almost as reluctant, on their own account to hasten them forward to the stranger's land.<sup>37</sup>

Not dissimilar to the "peculiar plants" James examined before encountering racial trauma, African Americans appear here as "specimens" of "primeval simplicity": more similar to plants, forest animals, or "rustic deities" than human beings. While Hawthorne professes a "most kindly" disposition toward these men and women escaping their enslavers, this ostensibly friendly feeling seems largely due to the haziness he projects with regard to their ontological status. "Not altogether human," their "latent manhood" inspires more sympathy than "the Northern black men."

Hawthorne here, as in the Pierce biography, justifies his own complicity. Eric Cheyfitz long ago demonstrated that critics seeking to salvage Hawthorne politically repress this passage.<sup>38</sup> It is easy to see why. His "providential," passive antislavery stance is politically and morally repugnant. But criticizing Hawthorne's passivity obscures the liberal dimensions of a broadly accepted understanding of agency as active and individualist. To be fully human, on this view, one can only be a world shaper, no longer constitutively shaped by the world at large, like Crèvecoeur's American, a transplanted European plant thriving on better soil, or like Hawthorne's "party of contrabands," men and women correspondingly seeking a land where they might flourish. If Hawthorne's plants have agency, while his heroes become heinous by pursuing domination, perhaps his exceedingly problematic stance in these moments also produces something worth salvaging. What Hawthorne's dalliances with the vegetable world show, and what his critics have missed, is that oppositional agency does not adequately index the human.

Hawthorne's "Chiefly About War Matters" states a preference for the "latent manhood" of the "contrabands," driven from the South, over the presumably overt manhood of free Northern Black men who, in this passage, and in the antebellum imagination broadly, represented escaped slaves like the cosmopolitan Frederick Douglass. Therefore, Hawthorne's sentiment is easily understood as a racist preference for a passive, "authentic," and nonthreatening form of Black existence, especially



over agentic, resistant Black people. Having actively resisted slavery by fighting for individual autonomy, this normative idea of the Northern Black man represents the self-made man. In "Self-Made Men," Douglass praises such sovereign individuals as "men who owe little or nothing to birth, relationship, friendly surroundings; to wealth inherited or to early approved means of education; who are what they are, without the aid of any favoring conditions."<sup>39</sup> These are liberal individuals *par excellence*. While his position on the question of human exceptionality is more nuanced in his other writings and indeed elsewhere in the same essay, Douglass's description of self-made men here, like Emerson's more famous encomium to the self-reliant individual, values Men precisely as creatures who transcend their environments.<sup>40</sup> Such men are entirely unlike plants. But Hawthorne has a special affinity for plants and a deep suspicion of the autonomous liberal agent. "Rappaccini's Daughter" overtly condemns aspirations for sovereign agency. Humans, for Hawthorne as for Crèvecoeur before him, owe everything to birth, relationship, and environment. "Like plants," the "poor fugitives" Hawthorne encounters depend on "favoring conditions" to flourish and effect liberation. So too do his fictional men and women. Hawthorne's racism is easily assailable, and his vegetative politics, which does nothing to make conditions for human flourishing more equitably available, is wholly inadequate. Nevertheless, his writing can be fruitfully mined for alternative ways of valuing both alterity and collectivity.

In reading Hawthorne's antebellum writings alongside Crèvecoeur's reflections on his colonial and revolutionary context, we can see that a botanical, environmentally contingent personhood remained available at key moments in US history. The persistence of this porous view of the human is politically significant, because across this same period a much more fully developed racial science increasingly defined people of color as aligned with nature while white men stood apart. This focus on human-plant entanglement might also help reorient debates about both authors' passivity on enslavement. Hawthorne's view of environmentally contingent personhood has much in common with Crèvecoeur's, but it contrasts sharply with Emerson's description of nature as the "NOT ME," or Thoreau's depopulated "Wild." Rather than separating humans from nature like his contemporaries, Hawthorne, almost anachronistically, retains Crèvecoeur's sense of interconnection, recognizing environment's primacy in shaping human being. And if men are like plants, then plants, too, are like men, with power to influence the world on which they also depend.

### Plant-Poetics

We have seen how, though separated by half a century, *Letters* and “Rappaccini’s Daughter” both show that voluntarism is often fruitless and sometimes dangerous. At the same time, these works’ core engagement with plants gestures at, if it does not fully realize, a more expansive humanism. What steps are necessary to move from the vegetative politics that ultimately paralyze Crèvecoeur and leave Hawthorne mold-ering? What stands between vegetative politics and a reconstructed humanism, suited to the full range of human being in its openness to environmental relationality? By way of conclusion, I will explore the idea that plants create figuration’s conditions of possibility. Rather than insisting that botanical tropes stage a one-way appropriation of the vegetable world, an acknowledgement of plant agency, however minimal, grounds ethics not in recognition or alterity but in the shared capacity for nourishment.

A longstanding consensus has understood plants as functioning purely metaphorically or allegorically in both *Letters* and “Rappaccini’s Daughter,” from Edgar Allan Poe’s critique of Hawthorne’s “spirit of ‘metaphor run mad,’” to Marx’s argument that, for Crèvecoeur, “the physical attributes of the land are less important than its metaphoric powers.”<sup>41</sup> Yet careful attention reveals the agency of plants in both texts, even or perhaps especially when they work as metaphors. This is not to make the absurd assertion that plants do not operate metaphorically in Hawthorne’s and Crèvecoeur’s work. It is instead to say that even the most immoderate vegetable metaphors are never “pure,” since, as Hawthorne and Crèvecoeur both dramatize, plants themselves give rise to their use as metaphors. Because plants’ very metaphoricity highlights agency as intra-active, distributed, and collective, they reveal the weakness of sovereign conceptions of agency and attendant formations of the human as Man.

Crèvecoeur often references the natural world’s features for metaphorical purposes, but in the same way that he traces individual agency’s socially distributed and complex pathways, he also grants the natural world a critical degree of agency. Crèvecoeur criticism commonly reads plants as simply metaphorical or allegorical, as when Ed White describes Crèvecoeur as conveying a “typically allegorical subtext [that] likewise links a particularized subjective perception with an objective or essential truth,” or when Marx asserts “for the farmer it is the metaphoric even more than the physical properties of land which

regenerate tired Europeans.”<sup>42</sup> Likewise Matthew Wynn Sivils sees Crèvecoeur as crafting “fables” that “transform the natural world into a showcase for metaphor-laden lessons on human morality.”<sup>43</sup> Yet Crèvecoeur’s understanding of how plants produce metaphors is more multifaceted. For example, in letter 11, when a visiting gentleman asks botanist John Bartram how he came to study plants, Bartram appears to set himself up as the prototypical self-made man, catapulted to world fame from modest beginnings. “I have never received any other education than barely reading and writing. This small farm was all the patrimony my father left me . . . but thee mayest rely on what I shall relate, though I know that some of our friends have laughed at it” (181). Yet in the tale he relates, he suggests that he is more “plant-made” than “self-made” when he traces his eminence instead to a simple daisy. Having wearied at the plough,

I ran under the shade of a tree to repose myself. I cast my eyes on a *daisy*: I plucked it mechanically, . . . and observed therein very many distinct parts . . . *What a shame, said my mind, or something that inspired my mind, that thee shouldst have employed so many years in tilling the earth and destroying so many flowers and plants, without being acquainted with their structures and their uses!* This seeming inspiration suddenly awakened my curiosity, for these were not thoughts to which I had been accustomed. (emphasis in the original, 181)

Inspired first by bodily exhaustion, then a tree’s shade, which had itself created the shelter needed for the flower’s blooming, Bartram finds himself, quite unusually, thinking and wondering. This is a notable recognition of plant agency. Emphasizing the *daisy*’s role and questioning his own, Bartram describes his entrée into botany as a collaboration between plant and human. Whereas he had previously harnessed the earth’s productivity to his own economic ends, this one daisy, captivating his imagination, shapes the future of botanical science.

Like Crèvecoeur’s, Hawthorne’s work likewise suggests that we can see human/plant intra-action in the work of metaphors. As with *Letters*, many have taken up Hawthorne’s invitation to read “Rappaccini’s Daughter” as an allegory of a fallen Garden of Eden: “Was this garden, then, the Eden of the present word?” (189).<sup>44</sup> Yet role allocations in this allegory remain decidedly ambiguous: Is Giovanni the Adam or the snake who trespasses in the garden? Is Beatrice Eve, serpent, or apple?<sup>45</sup>

What does it mean if the Fall results less from taking a bite of forbidden fruit than from being bitten by it? “Rappaccini’s Daughter” suggests that perhaps the most crucial figure Adam and Eve’s story is the Tree of Knowledge itself, just as the luminous plant at the center of the doctor’s garden can, as much as Beatrice, lay claim to being the story’s central character: it is, after all, Rappaccini’s (other) daughter. The plant’s “profusion of purple blossoms” immediately captivates observers: “set in a marble vase in the midst of the pool,” to make “a show so resplendent that it seemed enough to illuminate the garden, even if there had been no sunshine” (189). This beauty and power give even the willfully obtuse Giovanni pause: he worries over Rappaccini treating this plant as though it were capable of great harm and notes that its care requires Beatrice’s assistance. Though suspecting something amiss, soon enough he falls in love with Beatrice and sneaks into the garden, brimming with plants whose “gorgeousness seemed fierce, passionate, and even unnatural” (198). Though not as stunning as the purple plant, each bore signs of “assiduous care” (189).

This “magnificent plant that hung its purple gems beside the fountain,” like Eden’s Tree of Knowledge, might well metaphorize Giovanni’s sexual desire for Beatrice (190); yet the narrator clearly also notes the plant’s agency. Like Beatrice’s own, the plant’s agency is constrained and feminized but by no means purely passive. Giovanni spends the majority of the story dimly wondering about this luminous garden, while Beatrice cannot fathom that he has avoided the truth all along. She straightforwardly explains her connection to her sister-plant: “At the hour when I first drew breath, this plant sprang from the soil . . . I grew up and blossomed with the plant and was nourished with its breath. It was my sister, and I loved it with a human affection” (207). In recognizing this relationship as one of nourishment, mutual flourishing, and affection, Beatrice succeeds where her father and Giovanni fail: she sees her life as a profound intra-action of human and plant, mutually constituted, even nourished by one another. She repudiates her father for inflicting “miserable doom,” but she neither doubts her own beneficence nor rejects her sister-plant (208). If she is a modern Eve, the knowledge she offers is not the root of evil but a path to redemption.

The tale, ultimately, valorizes the constrained agency of *both* of Rappaccini’s daughters, particularly their ability to produce and adapt narrative, while it castigates Giovanni’s and Rappaccini’s vision of Man as separate from and sovereign over the natural world. In shaping the character of Giovanni, Hawthorne weaves misogynist and racist imperialist

tropes of female sexuality as unnatural and racial hybridity as toxic into his creation of Beatrice and her sister-plant. Noting the story's "age-old conflation of land and the female body" Anna Brickhouse establishes the story's relays "between toxicity and racial hybridity" by delineating its Mexican contexts.<sup>46</sup> Giovanni is both drawn to and repulsed by the plant's/Beatrice's racialized and feminized toxicity, his carefully preserved slow wittedness screening him from the knowledge that was always right in front of him (in this we can see a precursor of Melville's Captain Amasa Delano). By contrast, Beatrice and her sister-plant nourish one another, and, when Beatrice in turn seeks to offer the same "assiduous care" to Giovanni, he signals his own malignity in rejecting her. "Oh, was there not," she tells him with her dying breath, "from the first, more poison in thy nature than in mine?" (209). Giovanni's toxic masculinity proves more deadly than any poisons emanating from either Beatrice or her sister-plant.

Recognizing plant agency enables us to see how Crèvecoeur and Hawthorne, far from shoring up sovereign conceptions of agency through environmental domination, including violent diminishment of nature as pure metaphor, in fact limn a distributed model of agency involving intimate intra-action of human and nonhuman. The ability to be nourished, as Michael Marder has noted, is held "in common" among humans, plants, and nonhuman animals: "All living beings . . . participate in the act of being, to the extent that they are able to be nourished, to share nutrition as a common mode of being."<sup>47</sup> Describing plants' biological life as a "fragile balance of light and darkness, of the open and the closed," Marder argues that the metaphors plants engender are inseparable from their being (30). Marder's plants, like Crèvecoeur's and Hawthorne's earlier ones, "are not mere objects to be studied and classified; they are also agents in the producing of meaning" (35). Plants, and the metaphors they coproduce, quite literally traverse light and darkness, "the germination of a plant striving toward the light of the sun happens simultaneously with its roots burrowing ever deeper into the darkness of the earth" (29). This botanical approach further complicates the dualisms between paradise and dystopia, good and evil, purity and contamination that have so often constrained discussions of both Crèvecoeur and Hawthorne.

Toward the end of "Rappaccini's Daughter," a "vigorous and active spider" appears, "crossing and re-crossing an artful system of interwoven lines." Weaving a tale while looking on from above, Hawthorne's spider most obviously allegorizes the author himself, a "small artisan" (205). Yet this metaphor is impure, its signification promiscuous, as

simultaneously the spider also parallels the character of Beatrice, in becoming the first of Giovanni's victims. After Giovanni began to fear that he had imbibed some of Beatrice's toxicity, anxious to confirm his suspicions, he "bent towards the insect, and emitted a deep, long breath. The spider suddenly ceased its toil; the web vibrated with a tremor originating in the body of the small artisan. Again Giovanni sent forth a breath, deeper, longer, and imbued with a venomous feeling out of his heart; he knew not whether he were wicked or only desperate. The spider made a convulsive gripe with his limbs, and hung dead across the window" (205). Aligning author with spider using the masculine personal pronoun, Hawthorne positions himself as an Arachne, a skilled worker interweaving life, movement, breath, and death with plant, animal, and human life, susceptible to nourishment and venom alike.<sup>48</sup> This description equally fits Beatrice, the most sympathetic character in the story. By contrast, faced with knowledge of his own vulnerability, entanglement, and complicity, Giovanni, like so many in Man's still-unfolding fantasy of dominion, turns vicious. "Chiefly About War Matters," by contrast, offers a vegetable meditation on the relationship between history and cultural inheritance in the face of inescapable vulnerability: poetry, Hawthorne remarks, "is a plant which thrives best in spots where blood has been spilt long ago" (418). From Crèvecoeur to Hawthorne, we learn that the capacity to be nourished is shared mutually though not equitably among artists, spiders, plants, enslaved people, soldiers, and refugees.

Though Crèvecoeur's and Hawthorne's shared recognition of human/nature entanglement falls far short of shaping an egalitarian politics, it nevertheless prevents them from adopting theories of racial inferiority. If they were unwilling to fight slavery and unable to fully embrace the "other modes of being human" Wynter describes, both authors nevertheless critique "Man" seeking purity, separation, and domination of a material environment. Hawthorne saw himself as spider, his writing as so much vegetal matter. And even at his most politically reprehensible, he could not shake a sense that Man's others were "perhaps quite as good." Castigating the failure of "the human" to achieve universality in modernity, twentieth-century antihumanists and twenty-first-century theorists of the posthuman have represented the category itself as a kind of *reductio ad absurdum*. But fleeing the incoherence of the human has turned out to be a very effective way to ignore racialization and perpetuate the injustices that continue to fly in its wake.<sup>49</sup>

Instead of repudiating the human, we ought to lean into its unsettled and frequently grotesque embrace. Can we hear possibility, even

liberation, in those dissonant notes within the dominant European American tradition that sound the racialization of Man, separate from the natural world?<sup>50</sup> Recuperating humanism requires more than simply recognizing human/environment entanglement, as Crèvecoeur and Hawthorne did, and as has become fashionable once more with the rise of environmental humanities and the new materialisms. As Schuller explains, the kind of “wide embrace of models of plasticity” that characterizes much recent theorizing threatens to “recapitulate the biopolitical cycles we’ve been repeating for the last two hundred years,” while a more careful approach can use such insights to “build political models that sustain our collective bonds.”<sup>51</sup> To move beyond a vegetative politics that merely recognizes entanglement, to see how histories of domination and destruction unfold across a frequently asynchronous landscape, we must attend to rather than jettison problematic figures like Crèvecoeur and Hawthorne. There is no escaping this bloody ground, but its assiduous care can yield new modes of being human that honor our complex enmeshment in the web of life.

### Notes

1. J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, ed. Albert E. Stone (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 71; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text. Quotes retain Crèvecoeur’s ostensibly universal “man” as incorporating both men and women; ensuing analyses use “human” to describe this universal category and, following Sylvia Wynter, “Man” to denote duplicitous universalism.

2. Stefano Mancuso, plant neurobiologist, explains the case for plant sociality with Alessandra Viole in *Brilliant Green: The Surprising History and Science of Plant Intelligence* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2015): 81–122.

3. Crèvecoeur’s eighteenth-century view resembles Donna J. Haraway’s “natureculture,” with “nature” and “culture” so enmeshed as to be inseparable. *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

4. Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964, 2000), 110.

5. Per Barbara Jeanne Fields: “American racial ideology is as original an invention of the Founders as is the United States itself. Those holding liberty to be inalienable and holding Afro-Americans as slaves are bound to end by holding race to be a self-evident truth.” “Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America,” *New Left Review* 1, no. 181 (May–June 1990): 101.

6. See “Sameness and Science (1730–1750)” and “The Natural History of Slavery (1770–1802)” in Andrew S. Curran, *The Anatomy of Blackness: Science & Slavery in the Age of Enlightenment* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011): 74–116 and 167–215; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

7. Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom; Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 304.

8. Sylvia Wynter and Katherine McKittrick, “Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species?,” in *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, ed. Katherine McKittrick (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 31.

9. Katherine McKittrick, “Yours in the Intellectual Struggle: Sylvia Wynter and the Realization of the Living” in McKittrick, *Sylvia Wynter*, 9.

10. William Apress, *A Son of the Forest* (New York: published by the authors, 1829), 124; Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, ed. William L. Andrews (New York: Norton, 1996), 43, 44; Emily Dickinson, *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed.



Thomas H. Johnson (New York: Back Bay Books, 1976); Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* (New York: Penguin, 2002), 199.

11. Gale M. Temple's study of "medical manhood" explores the "fundamentally self-delusory and often sexist impulses behind science's claims to objectivity and truth." "Af-frighted at the Eager Enjoyment': Hawthorne, Nymphomania, and Medical Manhood," in *Textual Practice* 28, no. 3 (2014): 408.

12. David Greven argues that Hawthorne robustly critiques normative masculinity in *The Fragility of Manhood: Hawthorne, Freud, and the Politics of Gender* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 2012), 143.

13. Mary Kuhn produces similar insights in analyzing Harriet Beecher Stowe's botanical engagement in "Garden Variety: Botany and Multiplicity in Harriet Beecher Stowe's Abolitionism," *American Literature* 87, no. 3 (2015): 511.

14. Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972, 2000), 73.

15. McKittrick, "Yours in the Intellectual Struggle," 9.

16. Kyla Schuller, *The Biopolitics of Feeling: Race, Sex, and Science in the Nineteenth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 7.

17. Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*, 130.

18. Ed White, *The Backcountry and the City: Colonization and Conflict in Early America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 36.

19. For a stunning analysis of Crèvecoeur's Caribbean entanglements, emphasizing the centrality of "Sketches of Jamaica and Bermudas and Other Subjects" and his engagement with Abbé Raynal's vision (via Pechméja) of Black revolution to *Letters*, see Christopher P. Iannini, *Fatal Revolutions: Natural History, West Indian Slavery and the Routes of American Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012): 131–76.

20. Thomas Jefferson, "Query XIV," *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 1785, <https://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/jefferson/jefferson.html#p138>

21. Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Old Manse," in *Mosses from an Old Manse*, Volume 1 (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1854): 5–42, 20; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

22. Reviewing new science on plant intelligence, Michael Pollan notes that the apparent strangeness of plants stems from the highly differential, i.e., much slower, temporalities they inhabit. "The Intelligent Plant," *New Yorker*, December 23 and 30, 2013, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/12/23/the-intelligent-plant>.

23. Henry James Jr., *Hawthorne* (London: Macmillan, 1879), <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/18566/18566-h/18566-h.htm>.

24. Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Rappaccini's Daughter," in McIntosh, *Nathaniel Hawthorne's Tales*, 186; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

25. Gillian Brown, "Hawthorne and Children in the 19th Century: Daughters, Flowers, Stories," in *A Historical Guide to Nathaniel Hawthorne*, ed. Larry J. Reynolds (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 100.

26. Brown notes that the tale exemplifies Lamarckian principles but argues that it ultimately "repudiates the purely deterministic account of individuals" to demonstrate that "it is the malleability of the inherited body that Rappaccini's daughter ultimately signifies: the prominence of agency in even what appears the most paternally determined of life forms" ("Hawthorne and Children," 97).

27. Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Birthmark," in McIntosh, *Nathaniel Hawthorne's Tales*, 119; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

28. Cristin Ellis, *Antebellum Posthuman: Race and Materiality in the Mid-nineteenth Century* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 31.

29. Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom," 297.

30. Many scholars explore this question; I am indebted to Pamela Regis, *Describing Early America: Bartram, Jefferson, Crèvecoeur and the Influence of Natural History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); Thomas Hallock, *From the Fallen Tree: Frontier Narratives, Environmental Politics, and the Roots of a National Pastoral* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Ralph Bauer, *The Cultural Geography of Colonial American Literatures: Empire, Travel, Modernity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Ian Frederick Finseth, *Shades of Green: Visions of Nature in the Literature of American Slavery: 1770–1860* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009); and Iannini, *Fatal Revolutions*.

31. White, *The Backcountry and the City*, 37; Iannini, *Fatal Revolutions*, 176.

32. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," in *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Stephen E. Whicher (Boston: Houghton, 1957, 1960), 22.



33. C.f. Teresa Goddu, "Haunted by History: Crèvecoeur's National Narrative and the Gothic," in *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997): 13–30.
34. Qtd. in F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941, 1968), 194.
35. Luke Bresky, "American Studies in Review: The Recuperative Trend in Hawthorne Studies; New or Improved?," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 41, no. 2 (2011): 236.
36. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Life of Franklin Pierce* (Boston: Ticknor, Reed and Fields, 1852), 113.
37. Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Chiefly About War Matters: By a Peaceable Man," in *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, vol. 23, ed. Thomas Woodson, Claude M. Simpson, and L. Neal Smith (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1962, 1994): 419–20.
38. Eric Cheyfitz, "The Irresistibility of Great Literature: Reconstructing Hawthorne's Politics," *American Literary History* 6, no. 3 (1994): 539–58.
39. Frederick Douglass, "Self-Made Men," in *The Essential Douglass: Selected Writing and Speeches*, ed. Nicholas Buccola (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2016), 335.
40. Elsewhere in the lecture Douglass describes individuals as mere waves in an ocean ("the highest order of genius is as dependent as is the lowest" ["Self-Made Men," 334–35]). His laudatory description of the self-made man likewise contrasts with expressions of a special providence that enabled him to escape enslavement in his autobiographies. As Ellis points out, Douglass argues for a "common nature" and "mutual vulnerability linking humans and animals" (*Antebellum Posthuman*, 46). A more complex reading of Emerson's praxis as foundationally citational is likewise available in Eduardo Cadava's *The Climates of History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997). Such insights notwithstanding, Douglass, like Emerson, is frequently placed in a lineage of multiracial liberalism that also envelops figures like Martin Luther King Jr. and Barak Obama to justify racial capitalism's exploitative practices (e.g., regressive websites such as artofmanliness.com laud "self-made men"; see also Schuller, *Biopolitics of Feeling*, 205).
41. Edgar Allan Poe, "Tale-Writing—Nathaniel Hawthorne," in *Godey's Lady's Book*, November 1847, 256; Marx, *Machine in the Garden*, 128.
42. Marx, *Machine in the Garden*, 110; Ed White, "Crèvecoeur in Wyoming," *Early American Literature* 43, no. 2 (2008): 40.
43. Matthew Wynn Sivils, *American Environmental Fiction, 1782–1847* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 35.
44. See Carol Marie Bensick, *La Nouvelle Beatrice: Renaissance and Romance in "Rappaccini's Daughter"* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1985).
45. Anna Brickhouse convincingly links Beatrice to the indigenous South American serpent deity Cihuacoatl, "once worshipped as a patroness of vegetation." *Transamerican Literary Relations and the Nineteenth-Century Public Sphere* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 219.
46. Brickhouse, *Transamerican Literary Relations*, 217, 202.
47. Michael Marder, *Plant Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 45–46; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.
48. Timothy Ingold argues that all making is a modality of weaving in "Making Culture and Weaving the World," *Matter, Materiality and Modern Culture*, ed. P. M. Graves-Brown (New York: Routledge, 2000): 50–71.
49. See, e.g., Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); Jordana Rosenberg, "The Molecularization of Sexuality: On Some Primitivisms of the Present," *Theory & Event* 17, no. 2 (2014); and Jinhana Haritaworn, "Decolonizing the Non/human," in "Theorizing Queer Inhumanisms," *GLQ* 21, nos. 2–3 (2015): 212.
50. Sylvia Wynter, "The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism," in *Boundary 2: A Journal of Postmodern Literature and Culture* 12, no. 3 and 13, no. 1 (1984): 19–70. See also Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 1961, 2004): 235–39.
51. Schuller, *Biopolitics of Feeling*, 212–13.